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Judy Clibborn

2005 Session Highlights

Dear Friends,

I hope all of you are enjoying your summer. As many of you look ahead to a new school year, a new job, or maybe even a new place to call home, it's important to stay informed about how your state government is working to improve the quality of life in our communities and throughout Washington.

I am honored to be your state representative, and your advocate, in Olympia. I take this role very seriously and always welcome your thoughts and questions. I'd like to share with you some answers to questions I am often asked when out in the community, as well as some facts regarding common myths about our state and how it runs.

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Preparing our Children for the Future

I am especially pleased the Legislature enhanced support for our students and teachers by fully funding the voter-approved education initiatives to reduce class sizes and improve teacher pay, I-728 and I-732. In addition, as students work to meet graduation requirements, we expanded support for resources like the Learning Assistance Program.

Given the growing demand for enrollment slots at our 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities, I'm pleased we also funded room for 7,900 more students. I have always been a strong advocate of, and helped engineer, the connection between our community colleges and our universities.



2005 Session Highlights

I am very pleased we finished the 2005 Legislative Session on time - one of the few times in our state's 116 years of existence. I believe we accomplished great things this year. We ended years of gridlock and made some of the largest new investments in jobs and education this state has ever seen.

Investing in Washington

Our state has over \$750 million in unmet school construction needs. This year's Capital Budget invests \$600 million in schools, funding emergency repairs, modernization, and new construction – the largest K-12 construction budget in state history. The Capital Budget also spends nearly \$900 million to increase capacity at our public colleges and universities.

With this new money, we can get our students out of portable classrooms and reduce overcrowding in our schools. It also reduces the looming burden for our local school districts, emphasizing state support for our schools rather than increasing the burden on local property-tax payers.

Expanding Access to Health Care

A huge driver of rising costs for state government is the escalating price of health care. Rather than passing the bill on to insured health care consumers, we must deal with the crisis in our health care system and help bring down the cost of coverage by increasing access. This year we passed several pieces of legislation including:

- My bill setting in motion a plan to provide health care coverage to all children in Washington by the year 2010, while maintaining 100,000 enrollments in the Basic Health Plan. (HB 1441)
- Restoring \$80 million of \$82 million in lost federal mental health funding used to serve people not eligible for Medicaid and to provide services not covered by Medicaid.
- Requiring mental health coverage as part of health insurance plans, just as we cover any other illness.
- Allowing small businesses, uninsured and underinsured, the ability to join the state drug buying consortium.
- Creating a Joint Select Committee on Public Health Financing to review and recommend funding sources for public health services.
- Fully funding the Basic Health Plan.
- Allowing citizens the ability to buy cheaper prescription drugs by re-importing American-made drugs from Canada and by participating in a state-sponsored purchasing pool.



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Myth VS. Fact

Debunking some common misconceptions about our state

Myth: Gas Tax money is being used for human services and other government operations.

Fact: In Article 2, Section 40 of the Washington State Constitution, the Gas Tax is specifically mandated to be “placed in a special fund to be used exclusively for highway purposes.” The Constitution specifically describes what those purposes are and just as importantly, what they are not. Gas tax can only be used for roads, ferries, and the state patrol.

Myth: All Gas Tax money is being used for projects in the Seattle area.

Fact: The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has just completed an analysis that shows how transportation dollars will be raised and spent throughout the state, for the ten-year period from 2006 - 2015. When all transportation revenues and expenditures are compared county by county, revenues and expenditures are in balance between the Puget Sound region and the rest of the state. The Puget Sound region raises \$14.3 billion in taxes, and receives \$14.3 billion in projects. The rest of the state raises \$13.85 billion in taxes, and receives \$13.84 billion in projects.



Furthermore, a Strategic Freight Transportation Analysis conducted by Washington State University found that 70 percent of the trucks coming out of the Columbia Basin and North Central Washington are destined for the I-5 corridor and Central Puget Sound. About 40 percent of the trucks leaving Northwest Washington are headed for the Central Puget Sound, and 415 trucks a day from Northeast Washington are destined for I-5 and the Central Puget Sound. It is not a stretch to say the commerce of this state is largely dependent on the infrastructure of the Puget Sound region. If it fails, the impact on the rest of the state would be equally devastating.

Myth: There is no accountability for how this gas tax money is being spent.

Fact: WSDOT strives to be as accessible and accountable to the public as possible. To see your tax dollars at work, you can visit their website at: <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/> or visit the House Democratic website <http://hdc.leg.wa.gov/transportation.asp> for the complete list of funded projects and see where every dollar is spent.

Myth: The new Gas Tax is costing 9 cents per gallon this year.

Fact: The gas tax will only cost consumers 3 cents this year, with three more cents phased in over the next two years. All in all, a pretty modest rise and almost imperceptible compared to the drastic price increases by the big oil companies. And at least we’ll get something in return for this investment.

Let’s look at an example.

The Jones family drives two vehicles:

2001 Dodge Ram half-ton pickup, 20,000 miles a year, 14 mpg
2000 Nissan Ultima, 10,000 miles a year, 30 miles to the gallon

The gas tax increases will cost them \$10/month in 2006; and \$17/month in 2010.

2006: They’ll pay \$83 more in gas tax (\$65 on the truck and \$18 on the car), and \$30 in weight fees (\$20 on the truck and \$10 on the car), for a total of \$113. That’s about \$10 a month.

2010: They’ll pay \$174 more in gas tax (\$136 on the pickup and \$38 on the car) and \$30 in weight fees (\$20 and \$10) for a total of \$204, or \$17 a month.

Myth: We do not have universal health care.

Fact: In a sense we do have universal health care – no one is ever turned away from a clinic or hospital when emergency care is needed. The question we need to ask ourselves is, do we want to pay for cheaper, preventative care for all, or do we want to wait until the health problems become worse and ultimately cost us ten- or even a hundred-fold what it would have to receive treatment earlier? We all pay for those without health insurance whether it’s through private insurance or through increased taxes to pay for increased emergency care at our hospitals and clinics. From a business perspective, it just makes sense to invest a little money now in preventative medicine, rather than pay big bucks later.



Myth: The Governor has said we have cut positions but the number of state employees in our state is still growing.

Fact: State employees have increased from 91,642 in Fiscal Year 1996, to 106, 753 in Fiscal Year 2005. Of the 15,111 increase, 74% of the increased number of employees are working for the Department of Corrections (+1,975) and the state’s higher education system (+9,152).

Washingtonians have demanded stronger sentencing laws, which result in a higher prison population. They also want their children to have higher education opportunities. These demands clearly outpace the state’s general population growth.

One surprising area is the Department of Social and Health Services. Over the last ten years, their total number of full-time employees has increased by only 7.7%, far below the average for all of state government and the general population growth.

Myth: Classroom size and teacher workload has decreased in the past few years since passing the two education initiatives, I-728 and I-732.

Fact: While Washington may finally be on the right track, our state still ranks a miserable fifth worst in the nation in class size and teacher-to-student ratio, according to a study conducted by the National Education Association. Their statistics show the national average is 15.7 students per teacher. Washington’s average is 19.1 students per teacher.

Fortunately, the 2005 Legislature dramatically improved support for public schools, which will significantly help students and teachers and ultimately improve our children’s likelihood of future success. After two years of being suspended due to lack of funds, the people’s teacher-salary and class-size initiatives are fully funded for 2005-07.

Overall, the 2005 Legislature increased state funding for Washington’s public schools by \$981 million – about \$468 per student. I’m grateful to the P.T.A., teachers, concerned parents and others who supported our efforts to make 2005 a great year for children and public schools. By forcing the state to step up to the plate, it is my hope that we will also get some much needed relief for local property-tax payers.



Myth: The Legislature eliminated the blanket primary.

Fact: It was actually Washington’s major political parties that sued to overturn the blanket primary system. The court ruled in their favor, stating that a political party’s right of “free association” is violated by the blanket primary because voters who are not affiliated with the party have been allowed to participate in the party’s nominating process.

The Legislature was then left with the task of finding a new system. While all the state elected officials belong to one party or another, I can honestly tell you none of us were thrilled about the notion of changing the much-beloved blanket primary system that served voters in Washington just fine for many years.

Be that as it may, a change was required. I have always emphasized that a new primary election must meet the federal-court mandate — and ensure voter-privacy, guarantee voter-choice, and maximize voter-participation. What we don’t want is a system that runs the risk of disenfranchising our state’s more independent-minded voters. People in the Pacific Northwest, in fact, have been called fiercely independent. That’s OK by me. Every citizen should have every right to his or her fair say-so.

Got Myths?

Is there something about Washington State you’d like to know about? If so, I’d like to hear from you. You can use the space below, or find several ways to contact me on the front page of this newsletter. Thanks for your interest, and for taking part, in your democracy!
